

HILL-ROM SERVICES, INC. v. STRYKER CORP., Appeal No. 2013-1450 (Fed. Cir. June 27, 2014). Before Moore, Schall and Reyna. Appealed from S.D. Ind. (Judge Magnus-Stinson).

Background:

Hill-Rom sued Stryker for infringement of three patents directed to systems and methods for enabling hospital personnel to remotely monitor the status of hospital beds. Hill-Rom's patents included four disputed claim limitations: "datalink", "interface board including a processor", "message validation information" and "bed condition message." The parties stipulated to non-infringement based on the district court's construction of these claim terms. Hill-Rom appealed.

Issue/Holding:

Did the district court err in granting summary judgment of non-infringement? Yes, reversed.

Discussion:

On appeal, Hill-Rom argued that the disputed terms should have been given their plain and ordinary meaning. The Federal Circuit agreed.

The Federal Circuit disagreed with the claim construction adopted by the district court that "datalink" was limited to a wired connection. Even though the specifications of Hill-Rom's patents did not describe a wireless connection, the Federal Circuit held that there was no disclaimer or lexicography that would support limiting the claimed "datalink" to a wired connection. The Federal Circuit noted that a patent specification need not disclose or teach what is known in the art and that the absence of an embodiment teaching a wireless receiver does not prevent the claimed "datalink" from being given its plain and ordinary meaning at the time of filing, which the court held would not be understood by one of ordinary skill to refer solely to a physical connection. The Federal Circuit noted that there was no language in the specification disclosing that wired communication was an important, essential or critical part of the present invention. The Federal Circuit also relied on claim differentiation and expert testimony to support its claim construction.

The Federal Circuit similarly disagreed with the claim construction adopted by the district court that the recited "interface board including a processor" should be interpreted to include "a wall interface unit." The Federal Circuit again relied upon claim differentiation and held that the plain meaning of "interface" could include one-way or two-way communication. The Federal Circuit held that, again, there was no disavowal or lexicography in the specification (e.g., language in the specification extolling the virtues of interfaces that send and receive messages or disparaging interfaces that only send messages) requiring such an interpretation.

The Federal Circuit similarly disagreed with the claim construction by the district court of the terms "message validation information" and "bed condition message." The Federal Circuit held that there is nothing in the specification to limit the "message validation information" to a single data field or that judicial estoppel from an unrelated patent should apply to the claim construction of the "bed condition message."

Judge Reyna dissented, contending that with respect to the term "datalink", the intrinsic record is devoid of any description of a wireless "datalink" structure, the extrinsic evidence belies the majority's conclusion and the expert testimony was conclusory and unreliable.